

13
*The Usefulness and Advantage of
Afflictions in general.*

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S E R M O N,

Preached in the Parish Church of
Christ-Church, London,

On JANUARY 28, 1759,

And afterwards

At the *Sunday* Morning LECTURE,

In the Parish Church of

St. Giles, Cripplegate.

By the Reverend Mr. SMITH,

*Preacher of the said Lecture; and lately one of
the Curates of St. Andrew Holborn.*

L O N D O N:

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The Universal and Ancient
Catholic Church

SERMON

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Christ Church, London.

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By the Reverend Mr. BISHOP

Of the Diocese of London, and of the
University of Oxford.

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P S A L. cxix. 71.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes.

WOULD Men but impartially survey their own Actions, and examine them without any Prejudice in their Favour, they would soon be convinced that the Evils they feel, and those they have Reason to fear, generally result from their own ill Conduct, and the want of Submission to Providence; they either run wilfully into the ways of Danger, or daringly provoke the Almighty to chastise such Offenders, and make them feel the heavy Weight of Omnipotent Displeasure.

Afflictions indeed are severe Things, and of them we readily and bitterly complain; yet notwithstanding our Grievances, the Disease of Sin is so malignant, and human Nature so untractable, that Severity becomes absolutely necessary, and therefore, except sharp Methods are applied, they seldom cure the Distemper, or answer the benign Intentions of our heavenly Father; for no sooner are the Evils withdrawn, but our rebellious Appetites are in motion, and instead of ob-

structing their Progress, and devoutly celebrating divine Goodness for the removal of our Sufferings, we instantly return to our Iniquities, and fix our Minds on those Things which occasioned our Misery.

So frail is Man, so inconstant are his Purposes, that unless assisted by the efficacious Power of divine Grace, he will never be able to resist Temptations, or to overcome the frequent and overbearing Sollicitations of Flesh and Blood. It is Man's fond Attachment to earthly Delights which captivates the superior Faculties of his Soul, and so depresses his intellectual Powers, that he is no longer master of himself, but ignobly pursues a perplexing round of disquieting Amusements, which renders him utterly averse to devout Meditations, and wholly incapable of rational and spiritual Employments. Sensual Indulgencies inwardly corrupt his Nature, and ingross so much of his Time, as makes him disregard the final End of Life, and the important and awful Business of Eternity. When the Pleasures of Sense seize the Affections, and Men are delighted with deluding Objects, they seldom limit their vicious Desires, but are so intensely exercised by unrestrained Passions, that they spare no Pains to gratify, if possible, these undisciplined and unbounded Appetites. The Force of which wicked Resolutions darkens the Understanding to such a Degree, as causes Men to glory in their Folly, and foolishly depend on those Things which can never satisfy rational and immortal

tal Beings, but will by an immoderate Use of them, greatly embarrass their Minds, and cut out Work for sad and bitter Reflections.

When the Will is grown refractory, and inveterate Habits of Sin are indulged, Men sacrifice their Understanding to Lewdness, and become irreconcilable Enemies to their own Happiness. Thus transported by the Power of blind Passions, and obstinately bent upon pursuing evil Courses, no Expostulations will operate upon their unrelenting Hearts, nor the most passionate Entreaties change their evil Determinations: Indeed Conscience frequently interrupts their fancied Tranquility, which gives them some Disturbance. The blessed Spirit of God often reproves them, and inwardly witnesses against their wicked Proceedings; yet, these secret Admonitions are not regarded, and these powerful Reproofs very little heeded. The governing Powers are asleep, and those only awake that should be suppressed. There is such an Insensibility upon the Mind, that the ravishing Charms of Virtue leave no Impressions; the Beauty of Holiness shines in vain, and the most cogent Arguments prove ineffectual. The strongest Inducements are insufficient to engage the Ear, and corporeal Recreations have so influenced the Affections, that a Crown of Life when put into the Ballance, will not weigh down the lightest Pleasures.

Thus familiar with Earthly Delights, Men stupidly neglect their spiritual Welfare, and walk in an imaginary Security without any
Sense

Sense of their Danger, or that the slippery Path they tread, leads to the Chambers of Death, and hastens them to everlasting Destruction. Unhappy Man! Is thy Head so full of intoxicating Vanities, and thy Heart so set upon unlawful Projects, that no Reasoning will bring thee to Repentance, or deter thee from thy irrational and pernicious Pursuits? Yet, a severe Fit of Sickness, or some other heavy Calamity, will open a Passage to thy Heart, discover thy most secret Vices, and make thee know, by painful Reflections, how grievously thou hast been imposed upon by the deceitful Stratagems of Sin. Under these pungent Sufferings, Men generally regret their past Follies, and feel the stinging Reproaches of Guilt; for their drowsy Consciences are awakened, and their Understandings enlightened, which makes them not only bitterly exclaim against their former Ill-Conduct, but experience also the Vanity of all terrestrial Enjoyments; and that there is no real Satisfaction for the Soul but in God, who is an infinite and inexhaustible Source of Goodness, and in whom all true Felicity meets, as in its proper Centre: And therefore, let us obey the Divine Interposition, and no longer persist in our Obstinacy, but exert our best Faculties to acquire his Favour, whose Corrections proceed from Love, and are always tempered with Mercy; that we may be comforted under the sharpest Trials, and pass through the several Stages of Life with a Degree of Joy and inward Consolation:

Let

Let us utterly detest all vicious Courses, and suffer no unclean Thing to defile our Souls; but fortify our Minds with the Principles of Virtue, that we may not be Slaves to the World, or too eagerly pursue its mean, and perishable Concerns.

Would Men abandon the unworthy Gratifications of Sensuality, and submit their Wills and Affections to the Will of their Creator, they would perceive the wise Purposes of Heaven, and the munificent Designs of Providence in the Appointment of Afflictions, and in making those Evils which Men have brought on themselves, the Methods of forwarding their present and future Happiness. Whenever our Affections are thus resigned, the Stupidity of our Minds will be removed, our Fondness for this vanishing Earth abated, and we shall build all our Hopes and Expectations upon God; the doing of which will greatly relieve the Anguish of our Souls, and make us so sensible of the Divine Clemency, that we shall not doubt of the Divine Protection, but that God will be our constant Shield and Buckler, and our present Help in Time of Need. *The Lord liveth, saith the Palmist, and blessed be my strong Helper;* God will help us when we are unable to help ourselves, and comfort us when all human Comforts fail; when the Skill of the Physician is baffled, and Medicines prove ineffectual, and there remains no Hope of our Recovery, even then God will support us with his Grace, and the reviving Hopes of a blessed and glorious Immortality. So that how-
ever

ever grievous our Calamities are, considering the infinite Advantages they produce, we have no Reason to upbraid the divine Severity, or to object against the Righteousness of Providence: On the contrary, we should humbly acknowledge God's Goodness, and from a grateful Sense of his beneficial Visitations, be induced to cry out with the Psalmist, *that it is good for us to be afflicted, that we might learn God's Laws*: In treating of these Words I shall pursue the following Method; shew First the Advantages of Afflictions in general: Secondly, what those Laws were *David* acquired the Knowledge of, by being afflicted; and lastly draw such Inferences from what has been said, as tend to make us patient under Sufferings, and to improve our Minds in heavenly Wisdom.

And, First, I am to shew the Advantages of Afflictions in general: Afflictions, however dreadful in themselves, or disagreeable they may be, were the Causes of them impartially regarded, and the Ends for which they were sent observed, instead of questioning the equitable Distributions of Providence, or charging our Follies wholly upon the weakness of Nature, we should admire the insufferable Insolence of Man, and stand amazed at the inconceivable Goodness of God: For soon after Man was created, and invested with Power to discharge his Duty, he yields to the subtle Suggestions of the Tempter, proclaims open War against his Maker, and employs those Powers his divine Benefactor endued

dued him with, against his sovereign Authority ; by thus perverting the Use of his Faculties, and by frequent renewed Acts of Hostility, he daringly defies the Majesty of Heaven, and draws upon himself all those Evils that are the natural Effects of Sin, and the fatal Consequences of Man's Disobedience.

Yet, notwithstanding these manifold and reiterated Provocations, the Goodness of our Creator is so stupendously great, that he pities the Miseries of his rebellious Children, and succours them with the Energy of his heavenly Grace ; so that instead of appearing as a rigorous Judge, he illustriously displays the tender Character of a Father, and of an infinitely wise and gracious Being, who not only forgives the Offences of his Children, but will, upon their unfeigned Repentance, convert their Calamities into Blessings, and make them instrumental to promote Piety and Virtue. Would Men give themselves Time for sober Reflections, and frequently meditate on God's forbearing Mercy, they would not accuse him of Severity, even in the darkest Scenes of Life, but humbly confess their own Inflexibility, and that no Expedient is more likely to bend their reluctant Wills, or to make their Virtues more conspicuous than Afflictions. They call home our wandering Thoughts, reduce our unruly Affections to Obedience, and confine them within the Bounds of Modesty and Discretion ; by which Means evil Imaginations are corrected, filthy Images removed, and the libidinous Flames of

B Concupiscence

Concupiscence extinguished. The Heart which is the Source of Corruption, is purged from its natural Pollution and noxious Qualities; the Judgment is freed of its Prejudices; and the Understanding has a clear Conception of Things*. Reason, that bright Luminary of the Soul, now with little Opposition, reascends the Throne, and reassumes its Authority; the lower Powers obey its Commands, and those inferior Appetites are devoted to its Service. The divine Image is inwardly restored, and there appears much of that Order and Beauty in the Soul with which it was originally endued by its Creator, and which Man enjoyed in Perfection while he continued in a State of Innocence; the Soul that was blinded with sinful Lusts, clearly discerns the Danger of its former Condition, and the Misery it must have endured, had it not been awakened out of the Lethargy of Sin, by the penetrating Voice of Affliction.

When

* Reason, which is a Ray of the Divinity in Man, and should be the governing Principle of our Actions, is implanted in the Breasts of Men, by the merciful Father of our Spirits, that it might never be afar off, or hard to be understood, but shine with a Light as clear as the Sun in the midst of the Firmament; and though this bright Luminary may be clouded, and its original Force greatly abated, by the noxious Fumes of intoxicating Lusts, and the frequent Oppositions of contending Passions; yet its glorious Light cannot finally be extinguished, nor its natural Efficacy totally defaced, by all the darkning and forcible Powers of Iniquity; so that nothing must be admitted for Truth that destroys the Use of our rational Faculties, because this were to supersede the Means, and entirely set at nought that Knowledge whereby we discover Truth from Falshood, and genuine Religion from diabolical Delusion. See Bp. Stillingfleet on Idolatry, p. 556. Bp. Leng at Boyle's Lectures, p. 73. where this Matter is argued more at large.

When Men are thus influenced by Sufferings, and see thro' the numberless Mazes of Folly, and the fraudulent Schemes of Iniquity, instead of being anxious about Things temporal, they are more sollicitous to preserve tranquillity of Mind, and to controul the sanguine Demands of boisterous Passions, as knowing that while perpetual Discord reigns within, it will be impossible for them to enjoy whatever they may be possessed of without. Troubles are of such an efficacious Nature, that they not only gradually prepare our Spirits for God, by bringing us to an Acquaintance with ourselves, and by melting our obdurate Hearts into contrition, but they are the means of confirming inward Habits of Virtue, by preventing the Abuse of our intellectual Powers, and by freeing us from the dreadful Slavery of Sin ; that we may industriously pursue our own Safety, and vigorously endeavour to secure the Protection of him who is King of Kings, and the only Potentate of Heaven and Earth ; for if God be not our Comforter in Adversity, and our Preserver in the perilous Season, and at the Hour of Death, we are undone for ever*. When Men are under the Rod, and deeply affected with the

B 2 Calamities

* Men tryed in the Furnace of Afflictions, and thoroughly humbled for their Offences, are seldom lifted up with Pride, or apt to pronounce Destruction upon others ; they are too conscious of their own Failings, the Remembrance of which keeps them perpetually upon their Guard, lest they should be surprized by Temptations, and fall a Sacrifice to those direful Delusions.

Calamities of Life, they generally have a mean Opinion of themselves, and are adorned with the beautiful Robe of Modesty; this gives them such Sweetness of Disposition, as renders them utterly averse to Ostentation, and to all those ambitious Views which commonly swell Men with Pride, and destroy that amiable Grace of Humility.

Afflictions preserve in us awful Thoughts of God, and enlarged Conceptions of his incomprehensible Majesty, by making us so sensible of his supreme Authority, that we experimentally feel our own Insufficiency, and our Inability to help ourselves without the divine Assistance. A just Sense of these Things will make us quit all Pretensions to Merit, and so to renounce our Dependancy upon the Creature, that we shall intirely trust to the Mercy and Goodness of our Creator. Afflictions

Let not this weak unknowing Hand,
Presume God's Bolts to throw;
And deal Damnation round the Land,
On such I judge Thy Foe.

If I am right, O teach my Heart
Still in the Right to stay;
If I am wrong, thy Grace impart
To find the better Way.

Save me alike from foolish Pride,
Or impious Discontent;
At ought thy Wisdom has deny'd,
Or ought thy Goodness lent.

Teach me to feel another's Woe,
To hide the Fault I see;
That Mercy I to others shew,
That Mercy shew to me.

Mean though I am not wholly so,
Since quicken'd by thy Breath;
Oh lead me wheresoe'er I go,
Thro' this Day's Life or Death.

fictions, when sanctified, cause that Peace of
 Mind, and that durable Satisfaction which the
 World cannot give, nor all its glittering Temp-
 tations deprive us of. Thus armed against the
 counterfeit Beauties of Sensuality, and all
 the sad Varieties of corporeal delights, we shall
 be constrained to cry out with the Psalmist,
*Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there
 is none upon Earth that I desire in Comparison
 of Thee. For as the Hart panteth after the
 Water Brooks, so panteth my Soul after Thee,*
 O God: When Men are spiritually renewed
 and governed by the sublime and unalterable
 Dictates of Truth, their Minds are so full
 of celestial Ideas, and such bright Views of
 infinite Purity, that they perceive the gross-
 ness of earthly Possessions, and the inconfi-
 derableness of every thing but God, and
 what tends to promote his Glory, and the
 Happiness of all intelligent Beings. To such
 persons the Pomp and Splendor of this ma-
 terial World are but in little Esteem; nor can
 such be deceived by any of its delusive
 Charms. The grandeur of a crowded Theatre,
 or the Pomp of a numerous Retinue may
 dazzle the Eyes of the vulgar, and cause
 Admiration in the unthinking Multitude, but
 neither these, nor the Magnificence of a
 Palace, nor the resplendent Glory of a
 Crown, will make any Impression upon them
 who contemplate the shifting Scenes of earth-
 ly Pageantry, and the Perishableness of all
 sublunary Things. They view them not with
 a superficial Eye, but according to their real
 Worth,

Worth and intrinsic Excellency, and without any of those false Colourings the Imagination commonly brightens them with, to beguile unstable Souls, and to deceive unwary Creatures. The Pleasures of this World are disguised Appearances, but the Sorrows of it are real and affecting, and therefore Men accustomed to Troubles, and to contemplating the beneficent Intentions of Providence, think too deeply, and act more rationally than to depend upon such empty Enjoyments, as not only swiftly fly away from them, but also wither like the Grass, and crumble like the Dust, of which they are formed. There is no Stability in any animal Diversions, and the sweetest Sensations often prove tiresome; for though they refresh us when we are weary, yet they weary us when we are refreshed.

Whatever Happiness may attend us in a shining Hour, a dark Cloud soon casts a Gloom over our Felicity, and the pleasing Phantom vanishes as in a Dream, and passes away as the morning Dew at the Approaching Sun. All Things here bear the Signatures of Vanity, and vanish almost as soon as they appear. Fond and vain are our Hopes of Life, yet we are surrounded with the Monuments of Death; we see Persons of all Ages and all Characters disappearing! our Fathers, where are they? and the Prophets, do they live for ever? Human Frailty is a Truth so evident, that there needs no Pomp of Language to illustrate it, for daily Experience

science sufficiently proves this, and we feel in ourselves the Decays of weak Nature. Since Life itself is of so short a Duration, and our present State like a flying Shadow, it matters little what we suffer here, provided we are render'd fit for the divine Reception, and the Enjoyment of God's blessed Presence, in the bright Regions of Glory and endless Felicity hereafter.

* Search the terraqueous Globe, and pick out some of its choicest Delights, even those that are chiefly valued, and of the longest Duration, are no other than mutable Shadows, or faint Representations, in comparison of him who is the supreme Felicity of our Souls, and an Object proportionable to their boundless Desires. Were Men convinced that God is a Being of absolute Goodness, who is eternally possessed of every Perfection, and had withal a due Sense of their own Vileness, and their own Imperfections; it would inwardly produce the lowest Abasement of themselves, and the highest Reverence for God's adorable Majesty; the firm Belief of which, and constantly exercising these, or the like Meditations, would, by the co-operating Power of divine Grace, deliver the Soul from the Tyranny of Sin, and all the excruciating Miseries and direful Consequences thereof; so that the Time wasted upon impertinent Trifles, or in projecting imaginary Schemes of Felicity, is no longer spent upon such reproachful Vanities, but infinitely

* Were a Man so possess'd of terrestrial Treasures, that he had even acquired his utmost Wishes, the Prospect of some future

infinitely better employed in penitential Acts of Devotion*, and in fervent Supplications to God for Mercy, that they may participate of his heavenly Blessings, and the inestimable Privileges of Christ's spiritual Kingdom. In fine, Adversity is an excellent School; and tho' few care to enter into it, yet the Discipline thereof is such, as when patiently submitted to, will preserve us from everlasting Perdition, and qualify us for a Mansion in eternal Glory, where there is nothing to imbitter our Pleasures, or render our glorious Day unpleasant.

Were these Reflections duly attended to, the Methods of Providence would not seem too severe, and instead of impeaching the divine Conduct, it much better becomes contumacious Offenders to offer in sacrifice their Vices, and to acknowledge the incessant Care of the divine Reprover, that from a feeling Sense of his Goodness, they may generously express the Language of their Hearts,
and

future supposed Felicity, would tempt him to relinquish his present Possessions in Hopes of finding what this created World, with all its Perfections cannot yield; for the restless Eye of his dissatisfied Mind will be prying beyond the Heavens, and searching after some hidden Excellencies: So it is impossible that the Soul should rest, or that so divine a Spark should cease rising, until it is joined to that immense Flame of Glory and Majesty, from which it first proceeded.

*How far devotional Addresses may influence the Deity, none can be absolutely certain, but this we may affirm, that those Addresses sensibly affect rational Beings, and often draw their Affections from the World, and introduce the Love of Heaven into their Souls. Besides as he is proclaimed a God, hearing Prayer, so we have Reason to believe, that if we ask agreeably to his Will, he hears our Requests, and will answer our humble Petitions.

and say, *blessed is the Man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him in Thy Law, that Thou mayest give him Patience in Time of Adversity; for with the Lord there is Mercy, and with him there is plenteous Redemption.*

Thus have I shewn the Advantages of Afflictions in general.

Secondly, shall make it my Business to enquire, what those Laws were *David* attained the Knowledge of, by being afflicted. Considerations on the infinite Distance and Disproportion between the Creature and the Creator, will strike the Mind with awful Ideas, and instruct us in the nature of that Worship, which the high and lofty one that inhabits Eternity requires, and therefore we should exert our best Faculties, and see that all our Sacrifices of Prayer and Praises, which we present unto the Deity, be such as are agreeable to his all-comprehending Mind; because no Service, be it ever so amazingly grand, or its Ceremonies the most punctually observed, will be regarded by him, except those Ceremonies are spiritually performed, and ascend from the Altar of a purified Heart. He that is clothed in Robes of Light, and encircled with Myriads of glorious Angels, wants not the vanishing Praises of his Creatures, nor any of their fading Breath to proclaim his Excellencies. No, God that is eternally blessed in himself, and possessed with an everlasting Crown of ineffable Glory, values no Offerings like those of heavenly Affections

fections, and such as glow with Love and universal Benevolence: In Comparison of which, God pronounces his own Institutions not good; that is, considered in themselves, or when separated from moral Goodness, they are of no real worth; but all their Excellency is deriv'd from their being the Means appointed, to preserve the Knowledge of himself, and keep Mankind in subjection to his righteous Laws.*

In support of these equitable Commands, the Jewish Institutes were ordained; and was every Part of the Hebrew Ritual scrutinized, it would appear a regular System, admirably adapted to the Genius of that † stubborn People,

* These Observations on the Hebrew Ritual, are not offer'd as Proofs of its Divinity; that I have taken for granted, all that I intended by them, was to declare the genuine Design of the Ritual: For though at this Distance of Time, some of its Ceremonies are difficult to be accounted for, yet, this maybe evidently proved, that moral Precepts are interwoven throughout the Ritual, and the whole calculated to promote the Honour and Glory of God; the universal Peace and Happiness of Mankind. A judicious and learned Author observes, that tho' the Ritual taught JEHOVAH was so present with his People *Israel*, as he was not with any other People; yet it never taught the Presence of JEHOVAH was confined to the Temple; or as some have very unfairly represented it, that the God of *Israel* was a local God, or a circumscribed Deity. See LOMAN's *Hebrew Ritual*, p. 276. Dr. LIGHTFOOT's *Temple Service*. c. 9.

† Dr. South, speaking of the *Israelites* Ingratitude, and their abuse of divine Mercies, says, in his ludicrous Language, they were all along a cross, odd, untoward sort of People, and such as God seems to have espoused to himself, upon the very same Account that *Socrates* did *Xantippe*, only for her extreme Ill-condition, above all that he could possibly find, or pick out of that Sex, and so both the fittest to exercise, and to declare his admirable Patience to the World. *Vol. I. p. 421.*

Were the *Israelites* of such a froward Disposition, the Ritual seems highly useful to such a People, to free them from the Power of a perverse Will, and to give them the utmost Aversion to Superstition and Idolatry. See them fully described in the Jewish Antiq D. Burnet's *Archæolo. Phil.* Dr. Spencer's *de legibus Hebræor.*

ple, and to maintain a suitable Reverence, and filial Deportment towards the Majesty of God. And tho' these ritual Injunctions were highly regarded, yet they were not esteemed equal to Justice and Mercy: But only respected as Instruments to promote unalterable Truth and Righteousness, that Men might yield unfeigned Obedience to God, and acknowledge him as the supreme Lord and moral Governor of the Universe.

It is clear to every unbiaſſed Mind, that thoſe Laws which the pious Pſalmiſt learned by Afflictions, and which he beſtowed ſuch high Encomiums on, were thoſe Laws that are coeval with the Nature of Man; or thoſe unchangeable Precepts of Morality, which neither length of Time can obliterate, nor alteration of Circumſtances in the Creature cancel; but theſe moral Obligations are always the ſame, and will be what they were originally intended, a divine Directory to free Agents, to the final Conſummation of all Things. For they preſcribe what ſhould be done, ſaid, or thought, with reſpect to God, our Neighbour, and ourſelves, and to all the Creatures God has made; whether ſuch as have exiſted from the Beginning, or ſuch as ſhall commence in any following Period: Theſe Precepts have an immutable Relation thereto, and are never unconnected with them. So that whoever ſhall make thoſe Commands his Guide, and endeavour to reſemble the Deity in Holineſs, will always find a ſafe Retreat in God, be delivered from many terrifying Apprehenſions

prehenensions within, and be comforted under the greatest Peplexities without, and the most afflicting Scenes of Providence.

Holy *David*, sensible of these Things, and the impossibility of acquiring the divine Approbation, without adhering to the refining Rules of Virtue, preferred the constant Observation of those sublime Rules, infinitely before Thousands of Gold or Silver, or whatever the Bowels of the Earth can produce, or the tempting Treasures of a fleeting World afford; and therefore had Recourse to them in his Troubles, and in all the intricate Passages of his Life*. Moreover, he affirms from his own Experience, that the Pleasures which result from Obedience, and a constant Sense of God's perpetual Presence, are of so durable, and of so elevating a Nature, that even in

* Agreeably to which, says the sagacious Mr. LOCKE, in a Letter to an intimate Friend, written a little before, but ordered not to be sent till after his Death. "May you live long and happy in the Enjoyment of Health, Freedom, Content, and all those Blessings which Providence has bestowed on you, and your Virtue intitles you to; I know you loved me living, and will preserve my Memory now I am dead; all the Use to be made of it is, that this World is a Scene of Vanity that soon passes away, and affords no solid Satisfaction, but the Consciousness of doing well, and the Hopes of another Life. This is what I can say by Experience, and what you will find when you come to make up your Account; adieu, I leave my best Wishes with you. J. LOCKE".

God has demonstrated to every Man by implanted Knowledge and natural Judgment, and the Admonitions of the Law, how the Possession of Riches is not everlasting; the Ornament of Beauty is not perpetual; our Strength and Force are soon dissolved; and that all is Vapour and Vanity: and that only the good Conscience of Faith unfeigned passes through the Midst of the Heavens, and returning to Truth, takes hold of the right Hand of the Joy which is to come. Apostolical Constitutions, lib. 7. 34.

in the heavy Storms of Persecution, those Pleasures caused such Joy, and Rejoicing in his Soul, as made him admire the divine Munificence, and sometimes to break out in Raptures of Love, and to celebrate the Praises of him whose Glory shines in Heaven, and whose Goodness is visibly displayed on Earth, in changing the Affections of sinful Men, and in restoring lapsed Creatures to their native Freedom. *The Law of the Lord is an undefiled Law, converting the Soul; the Testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth Wisdom unto the simple; The Statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the Heart; The Commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth Light unto the Eyes; The Law of God is in his Heart, and his Goings shall not slide. As concerning Thy Testimonies I have known long since, that Thou hast founded them for ever, and that they are done in Truth and Equity.* These Scriptures abundantly confirm what I have already advanced, that the Law which the Psalmist boasts of, and which he professes to receive such lasting Comfort from, that no terrene Enjoyments bear any Comparison to it; was the Law written in his Heart, and woven in every Part of his Frame; and therefore more needs not be said to prove it, because nothing is clearer to Men acquainted with themselves, that without the inherent Principles of Virtue, and constantly obeying the sacred Dictates of Religion, there is no Relief for a wounded Spirit, nor any Support for a Soul oppressed with
Darkness

Darkness, or overwhelmed with the black Ideas of Misery and Sorrow. I shall now draw such inferences from what has been said, as tend to make us patient under Sufferings, and to improve our Minds, in heavenly Knowledge.

Were the benevolent Purposes of Providence, and the compassionate Care of Omnipotence duly regarded, and justly illustrated, we should discern such astonishing Scenes of Goodness as would not only silence the Clamours of guilty Creatures, and hinder them from perpetrating their evil Devices, but would also constrain them to reverence him, whose Power and Goodness are continually exerted in their Preservation, and to say with holy JOB, *I am vile in Thy Sight, what shall I answer? I will lay my Hand upon my Mouth, and make no Complaint against my God.* Whenever we are visited with Sicknes, or confined to Beds of languishing; instead of impiously reflecting upon our Creator, it is infinitely more rational, to forsake those Evils, which were the Causes of our Sufferings, than to revile our heavenly Father's Chastisements. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth; if ye endure Chastening God dealeth with you as with Sons, for what Son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? Furthermore, we have had Fathers of our Flesh which corrected us, and we gave them Reverence, shall we not much rather be in Subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live?*
 Fer

For they, verily, for a few Days chastened us after their own Pleasure, but he for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, it afterwards yieldeth the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby. Heb. xii.

Nothing can more beautifully illustrate Almighty Power, or more pathetically display paternal Affection, than those moving Passages of sacred Writ; and therefore we should keep a holy Jealousy over ourselves, and patiently wait God's just Determinations, since he does not wound us as an Enemy, but does mercifully correct us as a Friend. And tho' Clouds and Darkeness are round about his Throne, yet Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation of his Seat.

Lastly, I would infer, that since Afflictions are designed to awaken the Attention, and to procure convenient Season for reflection, we should destroy the Sting of those Chastisements by Repentance, and employ those Opportunities in learning heavenly Wisdom, the Knowledge of which will cause Men to turn their Eyes inward, that they may see the disorderly State of their Souls, and the Necessity of regulating the intellectual Oeconomy; for when the superior Faculties move regularly, and the inferior Appetites act under their Direction, there arises such a Complacency in the Mind, as infinitely exceeds the greatest bodily Delights, and the highest Quintessence of worldly Pleasures; Nay there is a kind of
Spiritual

Spiritual Fragrancy upon the Conscience, when it is daily watered with virtuous Actions, and the refreshing Springs of true Devotion.

To conclude, let us look up to JESUS for Help, and perform those Promises we made in our Distress, and in the very Bitterness of our Souls, that our Names may be written in the Book of Life, and our Repentance recorded in the Annals of Eternity. By thus wisely improving our Time, and by keeping a just Balance among the inward Affections, we shall commence Citizens of that Kingdom where immortal Spirits are arrayed in Robes of spotless Purity, and the christian Moralist shines in inimitable Beauty, and in unchangeable Glory. This Happiness was designed originally for us and would we be Partakers of it, we must submit to the Guidance of a merciful Saviour, who will lead us safely thro' this hazardous State, and bring us with Joy and Triumph to our blessed Inheritance. I shall close this Discourse with an excellent Collect of our Church.

We humbly beseech Thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon our Infirmities, and for the Glory of Thy Name, turn from us all those Evils that we most righteously have deserved, and grant that in all our Troubles we may put our whole Trust and Confidence in Thy Mercy, and evermore serve Thee in Holiness and Pureness of Living, to Thy Honour and Glory, through our only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.